

Central Kentucky Welding Classic

In what has become one of the most-anticipated events of its kind, the annual Central Kentucky Welding Classic (CKWC) once again brought students from across the state to participate in one of the top secondary education welding competitions in the region.



Welding students from across the state recently competed in the annual Central Kentucky Welding Classic.

Chris King, welding instructor at the Hughes Jones Harrodsburg Area Technology Center (ATC), hosts the tournament each November. He said some of the best student welders in the state compete for scholarships and prizes.

This year those scholarships and prizes amounted to more than \$50,000 with the top winner getting

a full scholarship to the Tulsa Welding School (TWS), one of the premiere postsecondary welding institutions in the country and a five-time sponsor of the CKWC.

For nearly a decade students have been taking advantage of the scholarship opportunities offered at this event, King said.

“We started with three schools and this year there were 14 that participated,” he said. “It is one of the largest welding competitions in the state, and they are coming from all parts of Kentucky.”

King added that participating students are likely to move into the field after graduation, and federal statistics show there will be available jobs in the sector.

The U.S. Department of Labor estimates that welding jobs will increase by 15 percent in the next 10 years and that properly skilled welders with up-to-date training should have the best job prospects.

Those prospects are even greater in certain areas. King said the good thing about the field is the availability of employment, with jobs that can pay in excess of \$35 per hour for those with quality skills.

Getting a head start at the high school level is important for those looking to continue their education in the sector, said King, who gets his students ready for their postsecondary studies, while an institute like TWS gets them industry ready.

Garrett Milby, the admissions representative with TWS in Jacksonville, Fla., was on hand to present students with their scholarship certificates.

He said the school also helps to secure materials for the event in addition to providing scholarships ranging from a full ride for the top welder to \$500 for every student participating in the tournament.

“We have a rich tradition and have been in Tulsa, Okla., for over 60 years and in Jacksonville since the early 2000s. We’ve been putting guys and gals out into the welding industry for a long time,” he said.

Milby added that there are many different types of welding positions available in the job market and different types of degrees available from TWS, including certifications and an associate degree program.



Chris King, welding instructor at the Hughes Jones Harrodsburg Area Technology Center (ATC), hosts the tournament each November.

“A student can actually complete the welding program and the associate degree in about 14 months,” he said. “And we’re not just limited to welding; we also have ship fitting fabrication, a pipe fitting program and an electro-mechanical technologies program, and all these can be completed usually in nine months or less.”

TWS also will help a student in their job search, be it near their home, somewhere in the country or even in the world, added Milby.

“Students will be diverse in that they can go anywhere they want to go,” Milby said.

He noted that the average welder in this country is 56 years old and approximately half a million welders will be needed in the next 10 to 15 years.

“Right now is a golden time in the welding industry because of the fact those baby boomers are now retiring. We have got to replenish that supply and meet that demand,” said Milby.

He praised the secondary welding programs in Kentucky and said 56 students from this state went to Jacksonville for a TWS tournament this year, and six of the top 10 in the event were from Kentucky, including first- and second-place winners.

Jeff Spears, a manufacturing engineer with Hobart Corporation who helped observe the contest, said he had to take a completely different job to get hired when he started, but it was his welding background that helped in that process.

“I knew once I got in the plant, I had the opportunity to bid on other jobs,” he said. “I had training in welding from the Casey County ATC, and I know that helped me get my foot in the

door. You have to be confident in what you're doing and I was pretty sure that if I could get in the plant, I would show them what I could do."

That mindset has obviously paid off for Spears, and he thinks the same can happen for those students who are enrolled in CTE programs today.

"If it hadn't been for the welding at Casey County, I'm not sure where I would be," he said.

"Now, I'm a manufacturing engineer and it all starts at this level for these students. Getting training at the high school level is a huge asset for the students."



Certified Welding Inspectors served as judges for the Central Kentucky Welding Classic.

Darrin Robinson is the welding instructor at Grant County High School's Career and Technology Center. This year marked the third year in which he has brought students to the welding contest. Having a relatively new program, he said it's important to get his students involved in such events to make them better in their program by seeing the best.

"Our kids, like all the others in this program, value their work, and they want their work to be better," said Robinson. "They put a lot of practice into it, and I think the scholarship money really intensifies their wanting to do well."

He pointed out that the students he brought are his best welders, but when they get into a competition such as the CKWC, all the participants are good welders.

"They see that and I think it makes them want to try a little harder," he said. "They will learn from this experience, and that is really what we are trying to do, prepare them for the next step."

Besides educational and industry support for CTE programs such as welding, King said it's also important to have local and state government officials involved as well. State Rep. Kim King spoke to the contestants and related her own experience to them.

"As I serve on the economic development committee in Frankfort, I hear from businesses and industries all that time that we need to have more highly trained students coming out of their high school careers ready for these jobs," she said. "My husband, son and brother all are currently welding, and they started their career right here in this very building."

Kim King added that she believes in everything that goes on in training students to have a functional, workable trade they can use right out of high school.

Milby said he thinks the welding industry will not only provide employment opportunities for students, but jobs that pay well.

“There is such a shortage in the career and tech fields, we’ve got to find them somewhere. I think if we can start exposing students and giving them the opportunity to explore these programs, we can get these kids jobs starting at \$12 to \$15 an hour with some making over \$30 per hour,” he said. “America is not going to stop building or moving forward, and we have got to have these students.”

CKWC Individual results:

1st Bradley Ford / Meade Co.

2nd Duncan Brothers / Nelson Co.

3rd Chris King / Harrodsburg

4th Matt Alexander / Rockcastle Co.

5th Cole Reed / Casey Co.



Team Results:

1st Rockcastle Co.

2nd Nelson Co.

3rd Meade Co.



CKWC Attendees:

1. Harrodsburg ATC

2. Southside Career and Tech Center

3. Rockcastle Co. ATC

4. Franklin Co. Career and Tech Center

5. Casey Co. ATC

6. Montgomery Co. ATC



7. Garrard Co. ATC

8. Nelson Co. ATC

9. Bullitt Co. ATC

10. Boone Co. ATC

11. Monroe Co. ATC

12. Corbin ATC

13. Grant Co. ATC

14. Meade Co. ATC